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For Release: December 4, 2002

Thelma Napoleon-Smith Sworn in as Newest Member of State Board of Education

Thelma Napoleon-Smith, a career educator who worked her way from teacher to principal in the Trenton Public Schools system, was sworn in today as the newest member of the State Board of Education. Napoleon-Smith was appointed by Governor James E. McGreevey to a term that expires in 2007.

Napoleon-Smith holds a doctorate in education from Columbia University and said she is an educator who fully believes all children deserve and are entitled to a quality of education in the state of New Jersey.

"I am humbled that the Governor would even toy with the idea of putting me on the State Board," Napoleon-Smith said. "I decided to accept this challenge because children are my life. And our children need all the help we can give them."

Napoleon-Smith, married with three children and three grandchildren, began her career in 1963 as a third-grade teacher at Parker Elementary School. She said she turned to teaching so she could provide future generations with opportunities to learn — something she herself struggled with as a youngster.

"I was discouraged as a teenager — I was discouraged to go into college," she said. "But my parents encouraged me to maximize my full potential. I wanted to make sure I went onto college and to work as a teacher so I could advocate for children."

Napoleon-Smith said she believes in Governor James E. McGreevey's 21-point plan for education and the Department of Education's efforts to make sure students across the state of New Jersey receive a superior education by using multiple and diverse paths to success. She said she looks forward to bringing her strengths to the State Board in order to further enhance education in New Jersey.

"I support whole-heartedly what Governor McGreevey has done," Napoleon-Smith said. "I am looking forward to working with other educators and thinkers to opening up a dialogue with others."

Napoleon-Smith began her education path in 1959, when she attended Cheyney University before matriculating to Trenton State College, now known as the College of New Jersey.

She received her Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education in 1963. She later received her Master's degree in Student Personnel Services in 1980. Fourteen years later, Napoleon-Smith received her doctorate in Education Administration from Columbia University.

Napoleon-Smith spent 13 years in her first job at Parker Elementary School. She then spent time in the classroom at Kilmer Elementary School, as a sixth-grade teacher and auxiliary/administrative teacher.

From 1981 to 1985, Napoleon-Smith was the principal at P.J. Hill Elementary School in Trenton. She then spent the next 13 years as principal at Gregory Elementary School, which she left in February 1998 to become Director of Elementary Curriculum for Trenton Public Schools. She held that position until August 1999.

During a similar timeframe, Napoleon-Smith also taught evening graduate classes at Cheyney University.

From September 1999 to May 2001, Napoleon-Smith was a student teacher cluster supervisor at the College of New Jersey. She left that position to become a teaching consultant for Smith-Carroll Educational Associates in Willingboro.

In her current job, Napoleon-Smith said she exhibits many of the strengths she hopes to bring to the State Board, namely teamwork and problem solving — not too mention experience as a career educator.

Throughout her time as an educator, Napoleon-Smith also received a host of awards. Among them: an honored member of the U.S. Registry's Who's Who Among Outstanding Americans in 1995; The Shiloh Baptist Church Outstanding Woman Award in 1993; and Trenton's West Ward Community Activist Award in 1985.

Napoleon-Smith lives in Trenton with her husband, Marcellus D. Smith Jr., who himself is a longtime educator. Marcellus Smith worked for three decades for the Department of Education.